



The countryside is worth a thousand words – Portuguese representations on rural areas[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Along with the well-documented transformations of rural areas in the last few decades, the social views, representations and ways of describing rurality in western societies have also changed. From such transformations, a threefold narrative on the rural seemed to emerge in lay discourses: a 'pre-modernity' or 'rural crisis' discourse; a productivist perspective and a 'rural renaissance' vision. In the first, rural areas are generally portrayed as less developed and in need of change. The second is related to the association of the rural with agricultural modernization. Finally, in the third, the countryside is increasingly understood as a repository of traditional cultural values and natural resources, in need of preservation. Despite the rise of hegemonic idyllic views on the rural in Portugal, following the tendency of the 'global north', there is a diversity of rural social representations, mainly related to historical and cultural specificities.

This paper aims to unveil the heterogeneity of Portuguese society's representations about the Portuguese countryside, and the factors related to the existence of different representations, based on the results of a survey directed to a sample of the Portuguese population (N = 1839). Using a hierarchical cluster analysis of variables related to the social representations of the rural, five distinct clusters representing diverse images were identified. A first cluster of residents holds an anti-idyllic rural image of Portuguese rural areas, which are mainly portrayed as a physical and inhabited space. A second group describes the rural as abandoned and disadvantaged. A third representation portrays the rural as idyllic, as a place of wellbeing. A fourth presents the rural as a place for positive transformation and socio-economic development. Finally, a fifth image presents rural areas as spaces for economic activity, mainly related to tourism activities and exploitation of natural resources. From the empirical evidence it is possible to conclude that social representations on the rural in Portugal are manifold, revealing some contradictions and overlapping images.

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1. Introduction

Although there is a strong tradition, within the field of rural

studies, in addressing social representations of the rural, a large part of the research has been conducted in rural areas of the 'global north', i.e. in the Anglo-American and Central European contexts. Despite some claims for the need to address the specificities of other parts of the (western) world (Figueiredo, 2011; Halfacree et al., 2002), a considerable void still exists in the literature both in central and (mainly) in more peripheral western and European countries, specifically in southern European countries such as Portugal. This paper aims to contribute to filling that gap by unveiling the heterogeneity of Portuguese society's representations about the countryside, based on the results of a survey directed to a sample of the Portuguese population (N = 1839).

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The paper starts by discussing some of the already well-documented transformations of rural areas in the last decades, particularly in Portugal, evidencing the influence those changes have had on the transformations of lay representations and ways of describing rurality. From such transformations, and as in other western countries, a threefold narrative on the rural also seemed to emerge in Portuguese lay discourses: a 'pre-modernity' or 'rural crisis' discourse; a productivist perspective and a 'rural renaissance' vision. In the first, rural areas are generally portrayed as less developed and in need of change. The second is related to the association of the rural with agricultural modernization. Finally, in the third, the countryside is increasingly understood as a repository of traditional cultural values and natural resources in need of preservation.

Despite the rise of hegemonic idyllic views on the rural in Portugal, following the tendency of the central parts of Europe, as discussed in the third section of the paper, there is a diversity of rural social representations, mainly related to historical and cultural specificities (e.g. [Figueiredo and Raschi, 2011, 2012](#); [Halfacree, 2007](#); [Murdoch, 2003](#)). The data analysed and discussed correspondingly in the fifth and sixth sections of this paper highlight both the diversity and the absence of hegemonic social representations regarding the Portuguese countryside. Using a hierarchical cluster analysis of some variables related to the social representations of the rural, five distinct clusters representing diverse images were identified. A first image presents an anti-idyllic rural, mainly portrayed as a physical and inhabited space. A second one describes the rural as abandoned and disadvantaged. A third representation portrays the rural as idyllic, as a place of wellbeing. A fourth one presents the rural as a place for positive transformation and socioeconomic development. Finally, a fifth image presents rural areas as spaces for economic activity, mainly related to tourism activities and exploitation of natural resources.

From the empirical evidence it is possible to conclude that social representations on the rural in Portugal are manifold and not clear-cut, revealing, therefore, some contradictions and overlapping images. The data shows that the idyllic notion – although important – is not dominant in Portugal, contradicting some studies conducted in more central European countries (e.g. [Halfacree, 1995](#)).

2. Rural areas' transformations

Throughout the few last decades, authors from diverse academic backgrounds have been trying to provide a common definition of the rural through different approaches (e.g. [Cavaco, 1996](#); [Clope, 2006](#); [Figueiredo, 2003, 2008, 2013](#); [Grimes, 2000](#); [Halfacree, 1993](#); [Mormont, 1990](#); [Oliveira Baptista, 2006](#); [Rye, 2006](#); [Shucksmith, 2006](#)). For this matter, as stated by [Rye \(2006\)](#) the classic works of [Pahl \(1966\)](#) and [Newby \(1980\)](#) are two examples of the myriad of works disputing the concepts of rural and rurality and their relevance within social science analysis. [Newby \(1980\)](#), for example, concluded that the rural 'has no sociological meaning'. Ten years after this statement [Marc Mormont \(1990, p. 36\)](#) affirmed, following the ongoing debate on what 'rural' is and on the social construction of this notion (although [Pahl](#) already referred to the 'village in the mind' in 1966) that "rurality is not a thing or a territorial unit, but derives from the social production of meaning". According to [Rye \(2006, p. 409\)](#) this debate has led to a reorientation in the quest for defining rural and rurality, as "rather than asking what rurality 'is' the pivotal question has become: how do actors socially construct (...) rurality?". Following [Rye's](#) perspective, it is therefore important to understand the ways in which the rural and rurality have been socially constructed, in order to analyse the social images and discourses conveyed by lay people, their

diversity and the main underlying factors behind them.

European rural areas, in general, have undergone intricate processes of transformation, mainly due to more global dynamics of change. Those processes add extra layers of complexity to an already extremely diverse subject. As authors such as [López-i-Gelats et al. \(2009: 602\)](#) mention, "there is a widespread assumption that associates the rural with the unchanged and unchangeable, but what constitutes the rural is under constant transformation and modification". One of the key changes deals with transformations in the agricultural sector (such as its modernization in some rural areas and its decline and abandonment in other territories) that motivated a set of changes in socioeconomic and demographic dynamics in said territories (e.g. [Soares da Silva et al., 2014](#)). The consequences of these processes have varied according to countries, regions and even regions within countries. One of the main consequences was the loss, in many rural territories, of the monopoly – in economic terms – once held by agriculture (e.g. [Jollivet, 1997](#); [Mormont, 1994](#); [Oliveira Baptista, 1993, 1996, 2006](#)) in rural areas and their progressive transformation into multifunctional spaces.

Despite their immense diversity, ranging from more peri-urban areas with still strong demographic and socioeconomic dynamics and, in some cases, a productive agriculture to remote and marginalized areas, Portuguese rural areas – especially the most isolated and remote territories – have also been subject to the above mentioned processes of change (e.g. [Figueiredo, 2003, 2011](#); [Moreno, 2007](#); [Nave, 2003](#); [Oliveira Baptista, 1993, 1996, 2006](#); [Portela, 2003](#); [Rolo, 1996](#)). In the Portuguese case, these processes have been further intensified by the country's accession to the European Union (EU) in 1986, whose orientations – especially the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), in which many of the European rural areas were recognized as places for nature conservation and multifunctional spaces ([E.C., 1988](#)) – led to the strengthening of the 'deruralization' process of the country, as well as to the abandonment and decline of many rural territories ([Barreto, 2000](#); [Covas, 1999](#); [Figueiredo, 2003, 2008](#); [Oliveira Baptista, 1993, 2006](#); [Rodrigo, 2003](#)). Nowadays, western and specifically Portuguese remote rural territories are increasingly considered as multifunctional spaces, where productive activities, such as agriculture or forestry, are sometimes as prominent as the (increasing) consumption-oriented activities like leisure and tourism (e.g. [Bell, 2006](#); [Figueiredo, 2003](#); [Figueiredo and Raschi, 2012](#); [Halfacree, 2006](#); [Potter and Burney, 2002](#)). Apart from leisure and tourism, new functions of the countryside include environmental protection (e.g. [Ferrão, 2000](#); [Figueiredo, 2003, 2008](#); [Nave, 2003](#)) and the preservation of both tradition and memories (e.g. [Bell, 2006](#); [López-i-Gelats et al., 2009](#)) and of the built patrimony and heritage (e.g. [Boura, 2002–2004](#); [Matos Fernandes, 2013](#); [Peixoto, 2002](#); [Silva, 2012](#)). Those territories are now "beyond agriculture" (e.g. [Marsden, 1995, 1998](#); [Oliveira Baptista, 2006](#)), "more produced than productive" (e.g. [Figueiredo, 2011](#); [Figueiredo et al., 2014](#)).

Many Portuguese rural areas may, therefore, be considered 'consuming idylls' ([Halfacree, 2006, p. 57](#)), directly opposing 'super-productivist' spaces. Similar conclusions are reached by [Bell \(2006\)](#), [Halfacree \(1993, 1995\)](#), [Phillips et al. \(2001\)](#) and [Short \(2006\)](#) and relate to the reconfiguration and redefinition of the rural in the minds of citizens. At the same time, these 'consuming idylls' are mostly low-density, fragile areas, as [Oliveira Baptista \(2006\)](#) states, nowadays representing more than 50% of the country's territory. These areas may also be characterized by ageing and decreasing population processes and by a fragile social capital ([Figueiredo, 2013](#)). Such profound and diverse changes tend to put rural territories in the middle of an identity crisis ([Figueiredo, 2008](#)), a functional schizophrenia ([Figueiredo, 2011](#); [Nave, 2003](#)) which

hasn't been completely understood and remains, in part, unexplored. Simultaneously, and in tune with those transformations, the ways these territories are represented by people – both those who live in rural areas or in urban settings – are multifold, and have also changed during the last decades.

3. Social images and discourses on rural areas and rurality

As suggested, the nature of the new functions attributed to rural areas – consumption-oriented rather than productivist – helped create brand new meanings (as well as new demands and consumptions¹) for those territories, which seem to be now complex, multifunctional entities, far from the once hegemonic view of the rural as a synonym of agriculture and food production.

As authors like Pratt (1996) and Frouws (1998: 56) have mentioned before, “discourses construct an object” meaning that, at the same time, an object may be reconfigured by discourses and images constructed and presented by several actors, agents and entities and through several means (e.g. Capela and Figueiredo, 2014; Figueiredo et al., 2013). As Pospěch (2014) and Rye (2006) state, the focus on the analysis of the representations and discourses about the rural and rurality was a significant part of the so-called ‘cultural turn’ in rural sociology (Cloke, 1997), this turn being also fostered by the processes of rural restructuring as pointed out, among others, by Marsden et al. (1990) and Woods (2005). As mentioned, this topic has re-emerged in the nineties (Halfacree, 1993; Jones, 1995; Murdoch and Pratt, 1993; Pospěch, 2014; Rye, 2006) mainly within rural geography and sociology.

The notion of the rural as a representation and a (lay) discourse² rather than a specific material location was first deeply explored by Halfacree (1993, 1995, 2007), based on Moscovici's concept of social representations. For the author, social representations and lay discourses about the rural are “an amalgam of personal experiences and ‘traditional’ handed-down beliefs propagated through literature, the media, the state, family, friends and institutions” (Halfacree, 1993, p. 33). Social representations may give different meanings to the rural and may contribute to its reconfiguration processes in several ways (Jones, 1995; Pospěch, 2014). Thus, society's representations on the rural did not only change as the territories themselves were being transformed – they also act as active drivers of change in rural territories. Discourses, including those advocated by the urban population, help redefine the functions and roles of rural areas (Figueiredo et al., 2013). Some authors, such as Bell (2007), use the expression ‘second rural’ to designate the ‘countryside in the mind’ and to distinguish it from the ‘first rural’, the material one.

A threefold narrative on the rural seemed to emerge from such material and cultural transformations: a ‘pre-modernity’ or ‘rural crisis’ discourse; a productivist approach and a ‘pastoralist’, ‘rural renaissance’ vision (e.g. Figueiredo and Raschi, 2011, 2012; Halfacree, 2007; Murdoch, 2003). In the ‘pre-modernity’ or ‘rural crisis’ discourse – which refer mainly to the ‘material’ or to the ‘first’ rural – rural territories are often depicted as backwards and less developed than their urban counterparts, in need of

considerable transformation and development. The productivist vision – also clearly referring to the ‘material’ rural – reflects an emphasis in the development of rural areas, driven by modernization processes mainly related to agriculture and food production. The ‘pastoralist’ or ‘rural renaissance’ narratives – related to the ‘second’ rural – deal mainly with the importance of the preservation of traditional cultural values and natural resources – especially for consumption through leisure and tourism activities (Figueiredo and Raschi, 2011, 2012; Figueiredo et al., 2013). The latter views are mainly stated by the urban population, who tend to represent the rural as idyllic, a reserve of nature and traditional cultural features (Figueiredo, 2003; Figueiredo et al., 2013). Some of the features of the aforementioned ‘pastoralist’, idyllic vision of the countryside, such as its environmental qualities (as opposed to the city), its authenticity, an idealized way of life, and its landscape and architectural features are increasingly global and hegemonic – especially in the ‘global north’ (e.g. Bell, 2006; Crouch, 2006; Figueiredo et al., 2013; Gamache et al., 2004; Halfacree, 2007; Murdoch, 2003; Perkins, 2006). These very positive representations of the countryside helped trigger new demands and consumptions in rural areas. Such representations of rurality, externally generated, have grown progressively independent and detached from the characteristics of rural areas (Cloke, 2006; Halfacree, 2007; McCarthy, 2008), and rurality seems to be ‘deterritorised’ and ‘delocalised’ (Figueiredo, 2013), leading to the emergence of notions as ‘representational cliché’ (Little, 1999), ‘virtual rural’ (Cloke, 2006), ‘urban rural’ and McRural (Figueiredo, 2013).

Authors such as Bunce (1994), Halfacree (1995), Bell (1997, 2006) or Short (2006) have explored and discussed the concept of rural idyll, a concept that is “often used pejoratively in academic circuits” (Short, 2006: 133) and has both different origins and representations. Although idyllic views on the countryside may share some of the same traits, such as the sense of nostalgia, authors argue that there is a multitude of ‘idylls’. To picture this, Bell (2006) mentions three types of idylls, constructed by different industries with different ends in sight and significantly different from each other: the ‘media idyll’, built by the entertainment industry, the ‘tourist idyll’, fabricated by the tourism industry, and the ‘gastro-idyll’, through the agro-food system. This idyll, which mainly exists in ‘the mind’ (Bell, 2006; Bunce, 1994), acquires its meaning by its comparison to its opposite – what Bell (1997) calls the “anti-idyll”. Bell gives as an example of the anti-idyll the way rural and small-town America are depicted in certain movies: images of fragmentation and backwards, of decay, violence and repression. A recent analysis of movies that have Portuguese rural areas as their stages (Figueiredo et al., 2015) also reflects the ‘dark sides’ of the rural idyll, with the rural being represented as a ‘hybrid space’ which is not only memoirist but represented as gloomy, anti-idyllic, religious, and a territory marked by negative, structural issues, such as abandonment, isolation, depopulation, ageing, and forest fires. This is also in line with the reflection of Pospěch (2014) about expert discourses on the rural in the Czech Republic, as well as Woodward (1996) identification of a relationship between the discourses on the rural idyll and the discourses on rural deprivation. Despite the fact Woodward identified a contradiction between those two notions, Pospěch (2014, p.97) states that “the normative rural idyll effectively conceals the marks of deprivation by presenting signs of deprivation as natural to rural life”, therefore placing together the ‘pre-modernity’ or deprivation discourses and the ‘pastoralist’ or idyllic representations.

The former assumptions equally demonstrate that despite the growing hegemonic idyllic views on the rural, there is a diversity of rural social representations and discourses, mainly related to historical and cultural specificities. Representations and discourses are manifold because rural areas are diverse themselves – they have

¹ Although the demands and consumptions of the countryside are not object of this paper, the generally strong connection between those processes and the images people possess on rurality has been argued (in tourism literature) (Bell, 2006; Figueiredo and Raschi, 2012; Molina and Esteban, 2006; Perkins, 2006; Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005).

² Although other authors have studied the representations and discourses about the rural conveyed by, among others, academics, social movements, promotional tourism materials, political discourse, mass media, etc. (e.g. Capela and Figueiredo, 2014; Figueiredo and Raschi, 2012; Figueiredo et al., 2014; Pospěch, 2014; Romão, 2008).

their own specificities and a multitude of new and old functions. People, too, have their own characteristics, expectations and experiences, which shape their own discourses on the rural and rurality that are often plural and diverse, sometimes contradictory and definitively not clear-cut. Rye (2006) summarizes the diversity of social images on the rural as well as the multitude of researches conducted on this subject, by analysing the images of the rural held by young people in Norway and he also provides a good ground for reflection on the factors underlying and shaping those images, following Bourdieu's reflections on social constructionism. Therefore, although the results from Rye's research may be qualified as 'equivocal', Bourdieu's key analytical tools as 'habitus', 'economic and social capital' as well as 'class structure' seem to influence the way (young) people represent the rural. Halfacree (1995), however, had found no relation between sociodemographic variables, such as age and gender, and the representations of the rural, attributing it to the hegemonic character of the rural idyll notion. Other authors, such as Bell (1992) and Newby (1980), state that there is a relationship between images of rurality and social class and rural living experiences.

Although there is some research on the potential factors influencing social representations on rurality, this research is still too scarce to draw conclusions in this field. Additionally, as mentioned before, the studies on the social images and discourses on rurality are concentrated in some geographical areas, with some more peripheral countries, such as Portugal, being highly neglected in this scope. The analysis undertaken in the empirical study presented in this paper intends to fill some of the gaps of the previous research, focussing on Portugal, a semi-peripheral country (Santos, 1990, 1993) within the European Union with a long-lasting process of rural deprivation, abandonment and political neglect (Figueiredo, 2008). Although Portugal shares some characteristics with other peripheral and southern European countries in terms of rural territories' transformations, the country possesses some specificities that have contributed to shaping current social representations on the rural, namely: an incipient process of industrialization and the maintenance of a traditional and small-scale agriculture (particularly in the northern and central parts of the country); a weak productive system (Mansinho and Schmidt, 1997); a long dictatorship period ('Estado Novo', 1928–1974) in which a 'ruralist' ideology and discourse was dominant (Figueiredo, 2003; Mansinho and Schmidt, 1997); a strong rural exodus and a continuing loss of population since the 50s (Oliveira Baptista, 1996); the loss of economic and social relevance of agricultural activities (Oliveira Baptista, 1996, 2006; Rolo, 1996); a recent rural rediscovery connected with tourism and leisure activities, as well as with nature conservation (Figueiredo, 2003, 2008); and a still strong and complex range of ties between rural and urban populations (Mansinho and Schmidt, 1997; Oliveira Baptista, 1996). These specificities, particularly in socioeconomic terms, place Portugal as a country mainly outside the 'global north' mainly in what concerns the productive fabric, the productivity levels (including in agriculture) and the patterns of consumption and their transformations during the last decades. These specificities also interfere in the ways in which Portuguese population relates to the countryside.

The above mentioned specificities, together with the lack of studies that analyse social representations about the rural in Portugal and other southern European and peripheral countries make this analysis relevant to trace distinctive [from the ones frequently analysed in the Anglo-American and central European cultures (Halfacree et al., 2002)] meanings of rurality. In fact, in Portugal social representations on rural areas and on rurality have been scarcely addressed in the rural studies literature. In 1997, Mansinho and Schmidt, based on the analysis of the scientific literature on rural areas in Portugal, provided some ideas on its

symbolic and ideological meanings. The authors concluded that the rural in Portugal was mainly represented simultaneously as a productive space and as an abandoned and neglected place. Those representations, the authors argued, were still very marked by the ruralist ideology of Estado Novo, as mentioned before. After the Portuguese adhesion to the EU, narratives and representations on the rural seemed to be more focused on the need to modernize the agrarian structures of the country, recovery some 'modernization discourses' of the 50's. In parallel, more recently, an increasing representation of rural territories as places for nature conservation seemed to emerge, particularly in the more urbanized populations (Mansinho and Schmidt, 1997; Reis and Lima, 1998). The diversity of meanings of rural areas and rurality seems to follow the diversity of rural areas in the country. However, as stated before following Oliveira Baptista (2006) about 50% of Portuguese territory may be defined as fragile and declining rural areas.

4. Methodology

4.1. Data collection

The present analysis is based on the data collected within a research project – 'Rural Matters'³ – through a questionnaire applied to a sample of the Portuguese population over 14 years old.⁴ The questionnaire was designed in order to collect data regarding the social representations and discourses about Portuguese rural areas, as well as to identify homogeneous categories of discourses. The questionnaire was applied between November 2013 and October 2014, combining personal interviews and online answers, after a pilot-survey in order to test the questions. A total of 1839 valid questionnaires were obtained, 59.8% through personal interviews and 40.2% via online form filling.

In order to select the respondents, a quota sampling approach was adopted based on the following criteria:

- (i) The municipality of residence categorized in three levels: level 1 municipalities – most urban (population density > 500 inhabitants/km², total population higher than 40,000 inhabitants); level 2 municipalities – the intermediate (population density > 500 inhabitants/km² with total population lower than 40,000 inhabitants and population density between 100 and 500 inhabitants/km² with a total population higher than 25,000 inhabitants); and level 3 municipalities – the most rural (all other municipalities);
- (ii) The parish of residence (categorized in two groups – urban or rural, according to INE classification);
- (iii) Gender;
- (iv) Age.

The questionnaire was designed based on a broad literature review regarding social representations on rural territories and rurality (e.g. Bell, 2006; Figueiredo, 2003; Halfacree, 1995; Jones, 1995; Rye, 2006; Short, 2006). The questionnaire was organized into four main parts. The first part includes questions about the image and discourses on rural areas. Respondents were asked to mention three words they would use to describe Portuguese rural

³ Within the Rural Matters project other types of representations of the rural were analysed through the content analysis of a wide range of documents, namely, the Governments' Programs; rural development policies and strategies; movies; news collected from two national newspapers; promotional materials from both the Tourism of Portugal agency and rural tourism bodies and networks; as well as programs and financial incentives oriented towards rural tourism.

⁴ According to the Population in the last Census (carried out in 2011) Portugal had 10.562 million inhabitants of whom 85% are more than 14 years old (INE, 2012).

areas and three economic activities they associate with these areas. Furthermore, they had to choose the aspect that first came to their minds when they thought about several dimensions of rural territories – agriculture, forest, nature and environment, rural lifestyle, cultural and built heritage, socioeconomic development and tourism and leisure. Respondents were also requested to select the information sources they normally use to obtain information about Portuguese rural areas.

The second part of the questionnaire encompasses questions concerning the consumption of Portuguese rural areas in terms of visits made to these areas (e.g. whether the respondents visited or not rural areas in the past three years, frequency of visits and trip motivations) and consumption of locally produced, small-scale food productions. The third part is related to opinions about several aspects regarding the development of Portuguese rural areas: the government action to develop several dimensions of rural areas (supporting agricultural activities, supporting forestry, supporting tourism, improving the socioeconomic conditions of local population, protecting the environment, preserving the built heritage, preserving traditional culture, diversifying economic activities); the level of socioeconomic development of rural areas; the characteristics which rural areas would have in the future and how the respondents wished that those areas would be in the future (abandoned, without people and activities; urban, with the same characteristics of the city; diversified, integrating new people and activities; forest areas, productive and profitable; forest areas, for conservation and for recreation; natural areas, where the nature and its preservation prevails; large scale agriculture; traditional, small scale agriculture; touristic, for recreation and leisure). Finally, the questionnaire includes questions regarding the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents (e.g. gender, age, marital status, educational level) and connections with Portuguese rural areas (e.g. whether respondents live in rural areas, worked in rural areas, place of birth – place of birth of parents and spouse – rural versus urban).

4.2. Data analysis

The SPSS software (Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 21) was used to analyse the data collected in the empirical study. First, in order to segment the residents, the words that respondents used to describe rural areas were grouped into nine categories (nine binary variables) defined based both on the results of the analysis and on a literature review (e.g. [Figueiredo, 2003](#); [Halfacree, 1995](#)): (i) rural as idyllic (including words such as, among similar others, beauty, purity, pleasant, authentic); (ii) rural as anti-idyllic (e.g. boredom, insecurity, toughness, idle); (iii) rural as disadvantaged (e.g. abandonment, neglect, unemployment, aging, depopulation, backwardness); (iv) rural as space of wellbeing (e.g. nature, healthy, wellbeing, quiet, secure); (v) rural as place of development/transformation (e.g. diversity, transformation, development, productive, prosper); (vi) rural as an inhabited place (e.g. people, characteristics of the inhabitants, names of places/villages/towns/regions); (vii) rural as space for economic activities (e.g. agriculture, livestock, tourism, food, forest); (viii) rural as landscape and place of resources and natural elements (e.g. water, animals, trees, landscape, green, mountains); and (ix) rural as a physical space (e.g. houses and other buildings, landmarks, among other physical traits).

The nine binary variables were used as input variables in a hierarchical cluster analysis undertaken using Ward's method and the Squared Euclidean distance to identify homogenous groups of Portuguese residents based on their representations on Portuguese rural areas. Considering the dendrogram and the agglomeration schedule, a five-cluster solution was retained. The agglomeration

schedules and dendrogram obtained suggested the existence of two, four or five clusters. Further, in order to identify the best cluster solution, as suggested by [Hair et al. \(1998\)](#), the clusters of the three solutions were profiled regarding the nine variables used as input in the cluster analyses – words that respondents used to describe rural areas. Comparing the results, the five clusters' solution revealed the most distinctive profiles, being thus the solution retained in this study. A K-means cluster analysis was also performed providing similar results. Chi-square tests were used to identify statistically significant differences among the clusters regarding several aspects – representations, information sources used, consumption patterns and motivations, opinions regarding the socioeconomic development of rural areas, connections with rural areas and sociodemographic profile of respondents.

5. Analysis

5.1. Sample profile

The majority of the respondents (92.4%) live in parishes which are considered urban and the remainder (7.6%) live in rural parishes, which is in accordance with the current distribution of the Portuguese population in the municipalities surveyed. The sample includes a higher percentage of females (56.0%) and a high diversity in terms of age (young people – 15–24 years old – represent 12.8% of the sample, the economically active respondents – 25–64 years old – account for 64.3%, seniors – of 65 or over – represent 22.9% of the sample). The majority of the respondents are married (34.8%) or single (37.5%), with 11% of respondents being widowed. Almost half of the sample (45.2%) has higher education but there is also a considerable proportion (17.7%) of respondents with the first cycle or a lower education level. The sample includes a high number of the employed (47.3%), but also a considerable number of the retired (26.8%), students (14.4%) and the unemployed (9.0%). More than three-fifths (61.5%) have relatively low net monthly household incomes (lower than €1500). Only 5.5% of respondents have a net monthly household income higher than or equal to €4500.

Analysing the three words used by respondents to describe rural areas, it is observed that almost half of the sample (46.9%) used words that refer to the rural as disadvantaged, backward or deprived. 34.4% identified the rural as idyllic and 33.9% as a place of wellbeing. Correspondingly 9% and 6.4% of the respondents used words that are related to the representation of the rural as anti-idyllic and as an inhabited space. The economic activities that respondents related most to Portuguese rural areas were agriculture, forestry and similar activities (92.4%), followed by leisure activities and tourism accommodation (37.0%). Regarding the information sources most frequently used to obtain information about rural territories, television emerges as the most relevant source (52%), followed by own experience as inhabitant or visitor of rural areas (43.7%) and the Internet (41.6%).

Concerning the consumption of the rural, the results reveal that 86.7% of respondents usually consume small scale, locally produced foodstuffs and that almost four fifths (79.9%) visited rural areas in the last three years. Among the latter 58.6% point out leisure and recreation motivations and 51.4% visits to family and friends. Work reasons are only mentioned by 13.6% of respondents. It is worthwhile to underline that more than a quarter of the sample (27.7%) visit rural areas in a regular basis: 13.7% have visited rural areas every month, 4.6% every two weeks, 4.8% weekly and 4.6% every day. In addition, 37.4% of respondents have visited rural areas more than 4 times in the last three years. The regularity of the visits may be related to the connections respondents possess with rural areas. Despite 92.4% of the sample living in urban areas (level 1 and 2 municipalities), almost 30% currently work or have worked in rural

areas and 15.3% were born in a village. Additionally, the parents of almost 25% of the sample were born in rural areas.

These characteristics of the sample were extremely relevant to defining homogeneous groups of respondents, based on their representations regarding rural areas as well as examining the differences between groups.

5.2. Cluster profiles

The hierarchical cluster analysis performed allows the identification of five different clusters of respondents. Statistically significant differences were found among the clusters regarding representations of Portuguese rural areas (Tables 1 and 2), information sources used (Table 3), consumption patterns and motivations (Table 4), opinions about governmental action regarding rural development dimensions (Table 5), connections with the rural (Table 6) and the sociodemographic profile of respondents (Table 7).

Taking the characteristics of each cluster it is possible to further explore the main features of each group regarding its representation of rural areas.

Cluster 1, the largest one (N = 563, 30.6%), may be defined as *The Anti-Idyllic*. Comparing to other clusters, this group tends to classify Portuguese rural areas more as an anti-idyllic space and as a more physical place, as inhabited and as the context for economic activities. This group most likely associates industry and construction activities to rural areas rather than agricultural and forestry-related activities as well as leisure and recreation features. Regarding the dimensions of rural areas, respondents within this cluster also identify more often environmental degradation and folklore. This group tends to perceive Portuguese rural areas as generally developed places, although they consider that Portuguese governments in the last decades have not acted in order to improve rural social and economic contexts. These respondents are generally older, retired and possess lower literacy levels. This cluster also includes the most married, divorced and widowed people.

Cluster 2 are *The Defeatists* (N = 530, 28.8%) and the most likely to describe the rural as disadvantaged and as the stage for agricultural and forestry-related activities. Although respondents within this cluster highlight the opportunities rural natural assets may open for tourism and leisure activities, they generally perceive these areas as underdeveloped and backwards, with agriculture being represented as abandoned, nature seen as degraded and population as aged. These negative representations persist regarding the future of rural areas in Portugal, as respondents consider that these territories will continue to be abandoned and underdeveloped in the future, continuing to witness population losses and abandonment of economic activities. Respondents in this cluster are more likely to have at least one of their parents born in rural areas. They are relatively young (25–34 years old), tend to have high literacy levels, to be single and to be in the first stages of their professional careers.

The smallest identified group – Cluster 3 – (N = 174, 9.5%) may be designated as *The Confident*, as respondents who most often tend to represent rural areas as places of development and positive transformation, as well as spaces for recreation and leisure activities. Although respondents within this cluster generally consider agriculture as an abandoned and neglected activity, they clearly stress the abundance of natural resources and the assets Portuguese rural territories seem to have in order to promote processes of transformation and modernization concerning socioeconomic development. They are extremely positive about rural areas' potential for diversification both in the present and in the future. They use the Internet most often as a source of information on rural matters. *The Confident* respondents are also the most enthusiastic in

consuming rural food products, as well as in visiting rural areas with leisure and recreation purposes. Respondents within this cluster are mainly between 25 and 49 years old, are most often employed and possess high literacy levels.

The Idealistic form Cluster 4 (N = 286, 15.6%). They tend to have an idyllic representation of Portuguese rural areas and often qualify them as places of wellbeing identifying at the same time a wide range of services and economic activities. Despite referring to the decline of rural population, they also highlight rural landscapes, fauna and flora conservation as well as rural traditions, healthier food products and typical villages. They are distinct from the other clusters by also being the most likely to consider Portuguese governments to have intervened in rural territories in a positive way (supporting agricultural activities, supporting tourism, preserving the built heritage, preserving traditional culture) and by pointing out the development of tourism and recreation activities as the most likely future for many rural areas in Portugal. Respondents in this cluster are generally younger (25–34 years old), students and persons that have completed secondary education.

Finally, *The Nature Lovers* constitute the Cluster 5 (N = 286, 15.6%) and they are more likely to represent rural areas as natural landscapes and as possessing a variety of natural resources. They often relate agriculture, forest and leisure activities to rural environments. Although they mention that the government has had a little intervention in several domains of the Portuguese rural areas (supporting forestry, supporting tourism, improving the socioeconomic conditions of local population, protecting the environment, diversifying economic activities), they perceive these areas mainly as places for food production and for socioeconomic transformation as well as spaces with remarkable landscapes to sustain the development of nature tourism and leisure activities. They use a wide range of sources of information regarding rural areas' problems and issues – mainly television, newspapers and magazines, family, friends, schools and art. They are generally young and possess fewer connections with rural territories.

6. Discussion and conclusion

Despite methodological differences, the data collected and analysed in this paper supports the findings of previous studies on lay representations about the rural and rurality discussed in the second section of the paper. The five clusters identified earlier clearly demonstrate the lack of homogeneity concerning social representations on the rural in Portugal, in line with the conclusions of Rye (2006) on youth representations of the rural. Furthermore they have also evidenced some contradictions inside (and between) each cluster regarding the social meanings of the rural, in line with the findings of Pospéch (2014), Rye (2006) and Woodward (1996).

In fact, apart from *The Anti-Idyllic* cluster, all the other clusters share some characteristics regarding the opportunities rural areas may encompass, particularly in terms of tourism and leisure activities and environmental conservation. This is again in line with the reflections of Pospéch (2014) and his assumption that there is not a fundamental contradiction between the social representations of the rural as idyllic and as deprived, since the signs of rural backwardness are frequently part of what people represent as the 'rural life' and therefore part of the rural idyll. Social representations of the rural in Portugal very often place these two dimensions together: on the one hand the rural as an abandoned, neglected and 'pre-modernity' space and, on the other hand, the rural valued as an idyllic place precisely because of the persistence of the signs of its 'pre-modernity'.

The largest group identified – *The Anti-Idyllic* – possesses, however, a vision that is completely diverse from the four other

Table 1
Social Representations of Portuguese rural areas – words and economic activities.

	Clusters					χ^2 (α)	
	Cluster 1 – <i>The Anti-Idyllic</i>	Cluster 2 – <i>The Defeatists</i>	Cluster 3 – <i>The Confident</i>	Cluster 4 – <i>The Idealistic</i>	Cluster 5 – <i>The Nature Lovers</i>	Total	
Words used to describe rural areas							
Idyllic	37.3	30.2	35.6	44.4	25.9	34.4	28.273(0.000)
Anti-idyllic	25.2	0.0	8.0	0.0	2.4	8.9	250.587(0.000)
Disadvantaged	30.0	100.0	54.6	1.4	22.7	46.9	973.438(0.000)
Space of wellbeing	11.0	29.1	20.7	100.0	30.1	33.9	709.923(0.000)
Place of development/transformation	5.3	0.0	100.0	3.0	5.2	12.0	1324.913(0.000)
Inhabited place	19.7	0.0	3.4	0.0	0.0	6.4	245.875(0.000)
Space for economic activities	40.7	17.9	5.2	26.6	43.7	29.0	147.569(0.000)
Landscape and place of resources and natural elements	7.8	3.4	1.1	14.3	100.0	21.3	1271.237(0.000)
Physical space	20.2	0.0	8.0	4.9	12.2	9.6	139.595(0.000)
Activities related to rural areas							
Agriculture, forestry and similar activities	88.8	95.3	89.1	92.3	96.2	92.4	25.040(0.000)
Industry and construction	14.6	11.3	13.8	11.9	5.9	11.8	14.342(0.006)
Activities of leisure and accommodation	24.2	40.2	48.9	41.6	44.4	37.0	61.988(0.000)
Commerce and services	14.9	14.7	19.0	19.9	11.2	15.4	10.359(0.035)
Typical products	19.9	17.5	13.2	16.4	15.4	17.3	5.564(0.234)

The higher values on each cluster are in bold.

Table 2
Representations of Portuguese rural areas – features firstly associated with several dimensions of rural areas.

	Clusters					χ^2 (α)	
	Cluster 1 – <i>The Anti-Idyllic</i>	Cluster 2 – <i>The Defeatists</i>	Cluster 3 – <i>The Confident</i>	Cluster 4 – <i>The Idealistic</i>	Cluster 5 – <i>The Nature Lovers</i>	Total	
When you think about the following features of rural areas what aspects come to your mind?	Agriculture	Abandonment/ Backwardness/ Poverty	Abandonment/ Landscape conservation	Tradition/Healthier food	Food production	134.982(0.000)	
	Forests			Landscape, animal and plants conservation		56.590(0.000)	
	Environment and nature	Degradation	Degradation	Abundance of natural resources	Landscape	89.574(0.000)	
	Social and economic development		Population ageing	Transformation/ Modernisation	Population decrease	Transformation	70.595(0.002)
	Culture and built heritage	Folklore/ Landmarks			Typical villages		62.717(0.001)
	Tourism and leisure activities		Contact with nature		Adventure		61.823(0.001)

Table 3
Information sources used to obtain information about Portuguese rural areas.

	Clusters					χ^2 (α)	
	Cluster 1 – <i>The Anti-Idyllic</i>	Cluster 2 – <i>The Defeatists</i>	Cluster 3 – <i>The Confident</i>	Cluster 4 – <i>The Idealistic</i>	Cluster 5 – <i>The Nature Lovers</i>	Total	
Television	55.6	47.2	43.7	53.5	61.5	52.6	23.107(0.000)
Newspapers and magazines	34.3	31.7	39.1	36.7	42.3	35.6	10.631(0.031)
Radio	9.4	5.7	10.9	10.8	17.1	9.9	28.097(0.000)
Internet	33.6	42.6	51.1	44.8	46.5	41.6	25.713(0.000)
Family	30.0	25.7	36.8	35.0	39.9	31.7	21.944(0.000)
Friends	26.5	24.7	32.8	31.5	34.3	28.5	12.303(0.015)
School	3.0	1.7	2.3	3.1	5.6	3.0	10.048(0.040)
Works of art	6.2	4.0	8.0	7.0	9.1	6.3	9.807(0.044)
Scientific material	5.2	6.6	10.3	6.3	8.4	6.7	7.203(0.126)
Own experience as inhabitant of rural areas	19.0	23.0	17.8	18.9	16.8	19.7	5.915(0.206)
Own experience as a visitor of rural areas	41.9	45.8	47.1	43.7	41.3	43.7	3.244(0.518)

The higher values on each cluster are in bold.

Table 4
Consumption of Portuguese rural areas.

	Clusters					Total	χ^2 (α)
	Cluster 1 – <i>The Anti-Idyllic</i>	Cluster 2 – <i>The Defeatists</i>	Cluster 3 – <i>The Confident</i>	Cluster 4 – <i>The Idealistic</i>	Cluster 5 – <i>The Nature Lovers</i>		
Visits to rural areas							
Visited a rural area in the last three years	75.3	81.1	86.8	83.9	78.7	79.9	16.175(0.003)
Motives to visit rural areas							
Leisure and recreation	54.2	59.3	64.2	58.6	61.9	58.6	6.425(0.170)
Work	12.7	14.0	25.2	9.2	11.5	13.6	22.270(0.000)
Visiting friends or relatives	49.5	51.4	43.0	54.4	57.5	51.4	9.061(0.060)
Frequency of visits to rural areas							
Just once in the last 3 years	7.8	4.0	4.6	8.4	7.5	6.4	57.532(0.004)
Two times in the last 3 years	7.1	7.0	10.6	10.9	9.7	8.5	
Between 3 and 4 times in the last 3 years	18.5	16.4	13.9	15.1	17.3	16.6	
More than 4 times in the last 3 years							
Every month	37.2	39.5	40.4	31.4	38.5	37.4	
Every two weeks	10.7	15.7	15.2	14.2	14.2	13.7	
Every week	3.6	4.0	4.0	5.9	6.6	4.6	
Every day	3.8	5.6	4.6	7.5	2.7	4.8	
Other	5.0	4.9	5.3	5.4	2.2	4.6	
Consumption of local products	6.4	3.0	1.3	1.3	1.3	3.3	
	81.8	87.1	94.7	89.4	87.8	86.7	20.552(0.000)

The higher values on each cluster are in bold.

Table 5
Opinions about Governmental action regarding some dimensions of rural areas' development.

	Clusters					Total	χ^2 (α)
	Cluster 1 – <i>The Anti-Idyllic</i>	Cluster 2 – <i>The Defeatists</i>	Cluster 3 – <i>The Confident</i>	Cluster 4 – <i>The Idealistic</i>	Cluster 5 – <i>The Nature Lovers</i>		
How do you think that governments have intervened in rural areas in the following domains?	Supporting agriculture activities	Governments haven't acted/They haven't done much			They have acted enough	They have acted more or less	52.804(0.000)
	Supporting forestry	Governments haven't acted	Governments haven't acted			They have acted a little	50.291(0.000)
	Supporting tourism	Governments haven't acted	They have acted more or less		They have acted enough	They have acted a little	60.963(0.000)
	Improving the socioeconomic conditions of local populations	Governments haven't acted	Governments haven't acted			They have acted a little	39.471(0.001)
	Protecting the environment					They have acted a little	32.096(0.010)
	Preserving the built heritage	Governments haven't acted			They have acted enough		26.676(0.045)
	Preserving traditional culture				They have acted enough		32.611(0.008)
	Diversifying economic activities	Governments haven't acted	Governments haven't acted	They have acted more or less		They have acted a little	45.574(0.000)
How do you evaluate the socioeconomic development level of rural areas?	Highly developed		Undeveloped				72.942(0.000)
How do you think rural areas will be in the future?		Abandoned, without people and activities	Diversified, integrating new people and activities	Touristic, for recreation and leisure	Forest areas, productive and profitable		73.961(0.000)
How do you wish those rural areas would be in the future?			Diversified, integrating new people and activities				65.877(0.002)

clusters. Respondents within this group see the rural as a place still inhabited and with socioeconomic dynamics besides traditional agriculture. They also portray the rural as not environmentally preserved more often, clearly distinguishing themselves from the respondents in the other groups that generally point out the natural resources and the preserved environmental features as a main rural asset. Only *The Defeatists* also portrayed rural nature as degraded, although, as mentioned, they also highlight some opportunities for

rural development based on rural areas' natural assets. The negative visions on Portuguese rural areas within this group persist when *The Defeatists* envisage the future of these territories. In fact, and in line with the transformation tendencies of general decline discussed in the first section of the paper (Figueiredo, 2008, 2011, 2013; Oliveira Baptista, 2006; Rolo, 1996) they have portrayed a rural which will continue to be abandoned in the future, losing more population and its socioeconomic dynamics.

Table 6
Connections with Portuguese rural areas.

	Clusters					$\chi^2 (\alpha)$	
	Cluster 1 – <i>The Anti-Idyllic</i>	Cluster 2 – <i>The Defeatists</i>	Cluster 3 – <i>The Confident</i>	Cluster 4 – <i>The Idealistic</i>	Cluster 5 – <i>The Nature Lovers</i>	Total	
Worked in a rural area	29.5	30.6	34.5	28.7	23.1	29.1	8.081(0.089)
Place of residence							
Rural area	7.8	8.9	6.3	9.8	3.5	7.6	10.450(0.033)
Urban area	92.2	91.1	93.7	90.2	96.5	92.4	
Place of birth							
Rural area	17.8	17.8	7.7	14.2	11.2	15.3	15.353(0.004)
Urban area	82.2	82.2	92.3	85.8	88.8	84.7	
Father's place of birth							
Rural area	25.9	27.9	17.6	23.3	19.0	24.2	11.858(0.018)
Urban area	74.1	72.1	82.4	76.7	81.0	75.8	
Mother's place of birth							
Rural area	26.1	30.0	19.2	22.8	18.6	24.9	15.442(0.004)
Urban area	73.9	70.0	80.8	72.2	81.4	75.1	
Spouse's place of birth							
Rural area	18.5	18.2	18.1	21.2	12.2	17.8	4.120(0.390)
Urban area	81.5	81.8	81.9	78.8	87.8	82.2	

The higher values on each cluster are in bold.

Table 7
Sociodemographic profile of respondents.

	Clusters					$\chi^2 (\alpha)$	
	Cluster 1 – <i>The Anti-Idyllic</i>	Cluster 2 – <i>The Defeatists</i>	Cluster 3 – <i>The Confident</i>	Cluster 4 – <i>The Idealistic</i>	Cluster 5 – <i>The Nature Lovers</i>	Total	
Age							105.005(0.000)
15–24 years old	9.1	10.6	9.2	21.0	18.2	12.8	
25–34 years old	16.0	28.7	32.2	20.6	22.4	22.9	
35–49 years old	18.8	21.5	28.7	18.5	17.1	20.2	
50–64 years old	24.3	20.8	17.8	18.9	20.3	21.2	
65 and over	31.8	18.5	12.1	21.0	22.0	22.9	
Gender							
Female	53.7	55.5	50.6	59.1	61.4	56.0	7.790(0.100)
Male	46.3	44.5	49.4	40.9	38.6	44.0	
Marital status							
Single	28.8	41.5	40.8	41.6	40.9	37.5	55.070(0.000)
Married	38.4	32.6	32.2	33.6	34.3	34.8	
Cohabitation	7.3	10.0	12.1	8.4	9.4	9.0	
Divorced/ Separated	9.8	8.3	7.5	7.0	3.1	7.0	
Widowed	15.7	7.5	7.5	9.4	12.2	11.0	
Level of education							
1st cycle or lower	25.1	14.0	8.6	15.4	18.2	17.7	104.887(0.000)
2nd or 3rd cycles	19.1	10.2	5.7	11.2	11.9	12.9	
Secondary education	23.9	24.2	20.7	29.0	21.7	24.1	
Higher education	31.9	51.7	64.9	44.4	48.3	45.2	
Economic status							
Employed	40.8	50.6	63.8	45.1	46.2	47.3	79.851(0.000)
Unemployed	9.6	9.4	8.0	8.7	7.7	9.0	
Retired	36.5	21.9	14.9	24.1	26.6	26.8	
Student	10.0	15.1	10.9	20.6	17.5	14.4	
Homemaker	2.5	1.9	1.1	1.4	2.1	2.0	
Other	0.5	1.1	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.6	
Net monthly household income							
500€ and below	18.6	13.8	10.3	14.2	13.0	14.9	25.114(0.197)
501€ to 1500€	50.0	44.8	42.6	47.1	45.1	46.6	
1501€ to 2500€	19.1	23.5	26.5	24.9	26.9	23.1	
2501€ to 3500€	9.0	11.4	12.5	8.0	8.8	9.8	
3501€ to 4500€	1.4	4.1	4.4	3.6	3.1	3.1	
More than 4500€	1.9	2.4	3.7	2.2	3.1	2.4	

The higher values on each cluster are in bold.

Apart from *The Anti-Idyllic*, all the other clusters identified in the analysis visibly portrayed the rural as a space mainly oriented towards consumption, mainly tourism and leisure consumption. This is in line with the trends observed both in Portugal and other

European countries and pointed out by [Potter and Burney \(2002\)](#), [Figueiredo \(2003, 2013\)](#), [Bell \(2006\)](#), [Halfacree \(2006\)](#), [Figueiredo and Raschi \(2012\)](#). This representation of the rural as a consuming place ([Halfacree, 2006](#)) also includes, in some of the

clusters (particularly *The Nature Lovers* and *The Idealistic*) environmental functions and the preservation of tradition, memories and heritage, as also pointed out in the works of Ferrão (2000), Bell (2006), López-i-Gelats et al. (2009) and Silva (2012).

It is also clear from the evidence analysed here that the rural, although still often identified with agriculture, is no longer an agricultural productive space. Agriculture seems increasingly portrayed as marginal, or abandoned, being replaced (in the 'minds' of a large majority of respondents) with other activities as tourism and leisure. In this context it is not surprising that the single cluster positively pointing out a rural development based on agricultural productions is the smallest one – *The Confident*. The respondents within this group are, as presented above, extremely positive about rural areas' potential for diversification, pointing out a representation of the rural as a multifunctional space, in line with the European Union and Portuguese rural development directives during the last few decades (Figueiredo, 2008, 2011).

The representation of the rural as an idyllic space is particularly conveyed by the last two clusters identified – *The Idealistic* and *The Nature Lovers*. The first, although grouping respondents that tend more often to recognize the rural population decline as a constraint, clearly portrayed the rural as a space of wellbeing and recreation. They share with the latter cluster the representation of the rural as a 'natural' space, although *The Nature Lovers* more often relate agriculture and forest (besides tourism and leisure activities) as part of the rural environment. Some of the features of these two clusters, and particularly of *The Idealistic*, are in line with the 'pastoralist' perspective discussed in the second section of the paper, which is more often identified with the 'second rural' notion (Bell, 2007) and deals mainly with the social valorisation of traditional features and natural resources. As argued, these representations are held more frequently by urban populations (Figueiredo, 2003; Figueiredo et al., 2013), are increasingly portrayed and assumed as hegemonic and global (Bell, 2006; Crouch, 2006; Figueiredo et al., 2013; Gamache et al., 2004; Halfacree, 2007; Murdoch, 2003; Perkins, 2006) and are being reinforced by cinema, mass media, and, particularly, by tourism promotion (Bell, 2006; Capela and Figueiredo, 2014; Figueiredo et al., 2014, 2015).

From the empirical evidence gathered and analysed in this paper, regarding Portuguese lay representations on the rural, it is possible to state that the social images on the rural in Portugal are not at all homogeneous because its content is diverse (although sometimes overlapped). This may be associated with the different characteristics of respondents in each cluster. Regarding this issue – i.e. the socioeconomic characteristics of respondents – the results presented here may be qualified – as in the study of Rye (2006) – as equivocal. In fact, apart from the first cluster – *The Anti-Idyllic* – there is no evident relationship between the characteristics of respondents and their representations of the Portuguese countryside. It is therefore clear that *The Anti-Idyllic* are composed mainly by older and retired persons, with low levels of literacy. In the other clusters there is a predominance of younger people with high to medium (secondary) levels of education. However, in some clusters the personal or familiar connections with the rural seem to play a role, in line with the conclusions of Bell (1992) and Newby (1980). This is the case of *The Defeatists*, who generally have at least one parent of rural origin and of *The Nature Lovers* who do not have, more frequently, connections with rural contexts.

The relative lack of correspondence between sociodemographic characteristics and representations of rurality has been pointed out by Halfacree (1995), although the author attributed it to the hegemonic character of the rural idyll notion. In the case of Portugal, and as previously discussed, the idyllic notion – although important – is not the dominant one. The analysis of lay representations of the rural in Portugal points out a non-homogenous but

predominantly non-idyllic vision of the rural. Results show that the Portuguese population does not possess a hegemonic and global representation in this matter which seems to contradict previous studies conducted in Anglo-Saxonic and central European countries (e.g. Halfacree, 1995; Halfacree et al., 2002) and seems to give at least some credit to the claims that southern and more peripheral countries portray the rural in a different and not so much positively hegemonic way (Rye, 2006). In fact, as discussed before Portuguese population's representations on the rural and on rurality are dominantly negative or at least not clearly positive. About 60% of the sample was within the clusters that portrayed the rural as anti-idyllic space or as a place with a rather bleak present and future.

The empirical evidence discussed in this paper reveals that in Portugal, representations on rurality are manifold and not clear-cut and they are largely opposed to the 'representational cliché' (Little, 1999; Rivera, 2007) dominant in northern central European countries, of the rural as an idyllic place. Results clearly demonstrate that that 'cliché' may not be quite applicable out of its prominent central and northern European context, as also illustrated by a Spanish study undertaken in Navarre, Spain (Rivera, 2007). The analysis provided in this paper on Portuguese representations on the rural clear contributes to fill the void in literature regarding other (more peripheral, southern European) contexts and to debate some dangers of the 'representational cliché' of the rural as mainly portrayed as an idyllic space, helping at the same time to shed some light in the variations of the meanings of the rural in different geographical and socioeconomic contexts. As expressed in the third section of the paper, although literature dealing with social representations of the rural is abundant, it fails to address other countries than northern and central European ones and particularly than Anglo-American ones (although some exceptions exist such as the already mentioned works of Pospěch, 2014 and Rivera, 2007).

The heterogeneity in social representations amongst the Portuguese population that the empirical evidence discussed in this paper reveals may happen because of the diversity of Portuguese rural areas, despite the general common declining paths; of the still strong liaisons Portuguese people have with rural territories (Oliveira Baptista, 2006); in spite of the influence of Estado Novo's 'ruralist' ideology in the older generations (Mansinho and Schmidt, 1997); as well as because of the long lasting political neglect of these areas (Figueiredo, 2013) that contributes to constructing a negative image of abandonment amongst the public.

In any case, the authors are fully aware that further evidence should be produced in order to clarify the factors underlying the diverse, contradictory and sometimes overlapping representations Portuguese people have regarding the countryside. Furthermore, more empirical evidence should be collected in southern European and more peripheral contexts in order to provide some comparison on the meanings of the rural and rurality. The specificities of the Portuguese case presented in this paper, comparing with the Anglo-American and Central European cases, although in need of further research, have however clearly pointed out the need to trace distinctive social meanings of rurality and to use different methodologies, perhaps more qualitative, in order to address and map the diversity of social representations in a sounder manner.

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